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ABSTRACT

Combative activities (boxing, wrestling, kung fu, etc.) are seen as having a positive influence on alienated inner city youth. Potential contributions of such activities in a school curriculum or recreation program include involvement, security, self-concept, and self-realization. Participants may be able to free themselves from such stereotype roles as "Hard Guy," "Head Hanger," or "Con Artist." Alienated youth seem to be more interested in fighting skills based on martial arts than in other aspects of self-defense techniques. Zen Karate, a combination of karate, boxing, and wrestling, is seen as one effective technique in raising self- and other-awareness. Principles involved in developing martial arts programs include (1) student development from structure to freedom, (2) clearly established goals, and (3) concept awareness strategies. (MJB)

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COMBATIVES FOR ALIENATED YOUTH: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Several years ago I wrote an article titled "Boxing Fights Back" (8) which argued that boxing instruction could make a special contribution to the lives of inner city youth. Since the publication of that article in 1971 I have been laboring in a variety of inner city and alternative school settings teaching boxing, wrestling, karate, kung fu, and self-defense trying to prove that I was right.

I would like to share some reflections on these experiences with you today. Please keep in mind that my ideas flow out of my own very subjective experiences, from my own personal journey. (4) Because of your experiences, they may not make much sense to you. However, they may open some doors for you, raise some questions that you haven't thought much about, or just reinforce you. Exposure to new ideas clarifies and may give some direction to your personal journey, but in the end, you are the message. Tom Robbins puts it this way:

> If you believe in peace, act peacefully; if you believe in love, act lovingly; if you believe in every which way then act every which way. That is perfectly valid. But don't go trying to sell your beliefs...You wind up contradicting yourself and you set a bum example. If you want to change the world, change yourself. (11)

Why risk introducing combatives to alienated youth? Shouldn't we be teaching them cooperative games instead? In my view, there are four potential contributions of combative activities for a school curriculum or recreation program containing problem kids. The first contribution is simply involvement, both to keep kids off the streets and to provide a legitimate way to drop out from both the hassles of living in a survival of the fittest world and the myriad of choices bombarding them in contemporary society. Other drop-out options such as drugs and even suicide are increasingly popular among adolescents. Besides the natural high that all sports offer, combatives offer participants an opportunity to stay focused on the moment more than most

activities because of the element of physical confrontation; any stray thoughts and one's nose gets bent!

The second potential contribution concerns feeling safe and secure in a survival of the fittest world. As I told a group of students at MacLaren School for (Delinquent) Boys, "In your world it's stick or be stuck." They looked at me as if to say, "What else is there?" In such a world, someone is always on the receiving end of a verbal or physical put-down which cranks up the perceived safety-security needs of many alienated youth.

Psychologist Maslow argues that safety is a more basic need than affection or self-esteem, that if we don't feel safe and secure nothing else matters much. (10) Seymour Fisher the psychologist says this:

> Each person in the world has to learn how to feel secure in that most fundamental home base of all, his body. He has to develop confidence that the walls of his body can adequately shield him from all the potentially bad things out there. (5)

The contribution of combatives becomes obvious: to help kids feel more adequate in the protection of their bodies through experiences and skill learning.

The third potential contribution moves beyond the safety need to the adolescent's search for identity. Once again, their survival of the fittest world conditions this search. Although traditional sex role values for all males have softened around the edges, most still connect bravery and aggressiveness to being masculine. The inner city male sex role intensifies these characteristics, especially violence and put-downs (6), and inner city adolescent females may also be similarly influenced. (12) Toughness then, is an integral part of the alienated youth value system, of his/her identity. In a wider sense, all of us are struggling to overcome what I call the grain of sand syndrome, the feeling that we don't count in the world. (2)

The "Bad, Bad Leroy Brown" image gives many kids a mythic heroic identity. Involvement in combatives is a socially acceptable way to live out the sex role values and to identify with courage, bravery, and the like. Some will just get reinforced; others need the identification.

The fourth potential contribution involves helping students to free themselves from the glut of ought to's and fears and stereotypes that significant others model, inculcate, and reinforce from day one of our lives. (3) Getting free means recognizing the safety need and the sex role-identity need and then working through these needs, either by self-acceptance or by self-change. Combatives can develop in students the strength and confidence to recognize their defense mechanisms, face their weaknesses, and behave more sensitively and openly. Teaching strategies (described later) need to be combined with a successful combatives experience for these things to happen, but the underlying concept is that is is easier to be soft (e.g., open, sensitive, caring) if one knows or feels that he/she could be hard (e.g., self-protective, brave, aggressive).

Stereotyping breaks down if carried far enough, but I have found that talking to the kids about three alienated youth stereotypes has helped them get in touch with these four contributions and the potential role of combatives in their lives. One such stereotype is the Hard Guy, who bases his identity on pushing others around. Society is helped a little if he gets involved in a program, because it keeps him from hassling others on the streets. Combatives involvement may also provide a socially acceptable way to live out his/her sex role/identity, thereby lessening the need to prove himself/herself on the street. However, the most important potential contribution of combatives is helping to free the Hard Guy of his need to be tough.

A second stereotype is the headhanger who feels sorry for himself/herself

most of the time and is the recipient of the Hard Guy's toughness. Involvement may help him drop out of his problems for a while, but combatives primarily contributes by improving his feelings of safety and by trying to free him from the headhanger syndrome in general.

The third stereotype is the con artist who uses a variety of defense mechanisms and street programming (manipulation is a major street skill) to avoid involvement and awareness of safety and identity needs. Combatives provide both an involvement experience and a direct confrontation with safety and identity needs which are difficult to work around.

So much for theory (loose theory, that is). Many physical education programs are theoretically bankrupt, but the transformation of theory into practice is even a greater problem. Implementation of combatives involves three dimensions for me: skills, concepts, and application.

Marge Heyden and I have organized self-defense techniques into six response levels (9) (available from us): 1) Mary Conroy's emergency tactics, 2) Bruce Tegner's anticipatory approach, 3) simple escapes, 4) complex escapes, 5) difficult situations, and 6) fighting skills based on the martial arts. With the exception of the escapes, I have found that alienated youth are more interested in response level six, fighting skills than the other response levels. In addition, levels one, two, and five teach emergency skills which could be used to injure others. The problem with response level six is the wide variety of martial arts from which to choose. My own approach to response level six has been to 1) teach a variety of specific approaches (wrestling or judo, boxing, karate or kung fu, and aikido or t'ai chi chuan each emphasize different skills approaches); 2) adapt Zen Karate for my own use. (1) Zen Karate combines karate, boxing, and wrestling, stresses defense instead of offense, and does not include the traditional forms handed down by many karate

systems. By presenting my version of Zen Karate in sets (hands only, feet only, hands and feet, throws) and progressively moving from executing the sets and blocks to randomizing the sets to randomizing with counters and eventually to line and then free sparring, the notion of fighting as an open skill is preserved.

Concepts can be integrated into a combatives unit or program. Fitness concepts such as strength and aerobic capacity make a lot of sense in street fighting, especially if a defensive approach of trying to stay away from and outlast one's opponent is employed. Motor learning concepts such as simplicity, practice, and feedback are built into the Zen Karate adaption. Awareness concepts are especially important if the fourth contribution of combatives, getting free, is to take hold. Students can be taught three awareness levels: no awareness in which the hard guy, headhanger, and con artist play out their roles; self awareness in which each individual assesses his/her weaknesses and strengths and makes a play for self improvement; and other-awareness in which people begin to reach out beyond themselves to help others.

Application of these skills and concepts is based on several principles: 1) students should be able to earn their way from structure to freedom as their level of awareness improves; 2) Clear criteria should be set to protect students from arbitrary teacher decisions and to permit teachers to interact freely with students (playing favorites is okay if criteria for advancement are clear), 3) conceptual understanding and some indication of self-awareness should be included in the criteria. In this approach, involvement is the first goal, using whatever tradeoffs are available to encourage students to try it. If students are voluntary or highly motivated, reward systems will only confuse things and perhaps encourage dependency on rewards

(the principle of least intervention), but with alienated youth this is perhaps the least of one's worries. If this first goal is accomplished, concepts can then be introduced, slowly and carefully. The first step away from group instruction is a contract, eligibility being based on meeting specified criteria (know some concepts, show some selfawareness so you can plan on your own). Contracts may involve working on sets, sparring, working on kata, learning advanced skills, learning from pictures in books, helping others to learn. If successful in meeting their contracts, students may be able to move to openly negotiating what they want to do on a daily basis without the prior planning a contract requires. Beyond Balls and Bats (7) describes all of these applications in detail.

A famous marriage counselor was once quoted as saying "Marriage doesn't work. Nothing works." I've often had that feeling when working with alienated youth, but I believe in the click theory which states that we can affect behavior, our own and that of others, but only one click or so. And often we and others end wind up backsliding half a click. We need to ask ourselves "What's worth doing?" Only you can answer that question for yourself. It gets back to our personal journey. For me, trying to help alienated youth makes sense, and these ideas have helped me. If any of them make sense to you, help yourself.

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